

THINKSDAY

Golden Crowned Kinglet

May 21, 2026

Praying — Mary Oliver

*It doesn't have to be
the blue irises. It could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch
a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't a
contest but the doorway
into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak.*

On April 1 I took a walk in the Spear Farm Estuary Preserve. No camera with me, and no earbuds. But I did have my phone and with it the Merlin Bird ID app. Not many steps down the trail I heard a faint call from the brush nearby; a small bird, no doubt, but it was almost a mouse-like squeak. I stopped and let Merlin try to identify the pipsqueak from the high thin call. Quickly it flashed up Golden Crowned Kinglet. But Merlin was still doing its magical listening and soon added Northern Cardinal, American Robin, Crow, Tufted Titmouse, and Phoebe to the choir roster. Sure enough, I could identify those easy ones, but I hadn't even noted their presence before. Evidently, I had already been lost in some other thought such that the familiar or more ordinary sounds didn't even register. It was only the unusual quiet voice that caught my attention—until Merlin kindly flagged the others for me.

I vaguely recalled thinking I spotted a Golden Crowned Kinglet once a year or two earlier, but never got a clear picture and was never convinced it wasn't just another "little brown bird"... a very common species around here. I determined right then that (1) I would return the next day with my camera to see if I could get him in pixels, and (2) I would never again walk in the woods with earbuds. On April 2, at the same time in nearly the same place, I heard him again and I was prepared—almost. I heard the squeak, and spied movement low

in a balsam fir... I stood still (forgetting to remove the lens cap) and spotted him for sure... a Ruby Crowned Kinglet! Huh—a Ruby?! Another great find. I managed to slip off the lens cap and re-search the spot through the zoom lens. Coming into view just a few feet from where I spied Ruby, there was the Golden Crowned Kinglet, and I snapped the proof! Merlin listened again and confirmed, then later doubled down on its finding from the photo. Cool; gotcha!

I'll be back to check on that possible Ruby Crowned sighting...although if he was there at all he was likely just on his way through to Canada. Funny how paying attention can connect you to who or what's there—and sometimes to who is not. I'm thankful to have found this friend in the woods; and I'm delighted that he spoke up to reconnect me to the silence of the woods. Who else speaks in the silence? And who is it that's always with you even when you don't always notice?

Happy Thinksday